

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington February 28, 2003

EDUCATING THE CHILDREN OF OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM

This week, even as thousands of members of our military are being called away from their homes for deployment, the Administration revealed its intention to cut funding to educate the children of these brave servicemen and women.

The President has proposed cutting \$175 million cut to Impact Aid, a program that provides federal resources to local communities where the federal government is a significant landowner, to make up the lost property tax revenue that would have helped pay for schools and teachers.

On Tuesday, I sent a letter to the President urging him to restore this critical funding and explaining the effect it would have on our military communities in Washington state. This policy sends a terrible message to our men and women in uniform. Their Commander-in-Chief should be squarely supporting them, not cutting education for their children.

Last year, our state received about \$52 million in Impact Aid funding for the communities at Fort Lewis, McChord, Everett, Whidbey Island, Bangor, Fairchild and Bremerton. The budget the President has proposed would eliminate over \$6 million to help educate students in Washington state.

One of the most dramatic examples of Impact Aid's success is in Medical Lake, Washington, whose school district serves the children of military families stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base. For several years, the children of servicemen and women who attended Blair Elementary on Fairchild were forced to eat lunch in the hallways and endure leaking roofs. Congress intervened, along with the State of Washington and funded construction of an elementary school for these children.

Other military impacted school districts in Washington state have similar, serious problems since they cannot tax federal properties within their school districts.

I am shocked that the President is considering cutting funds to educate the children of our military men and women. Every parent wants the best for their children and our men and women in uniform are no different, and they deserve no less.

I started the day by interviewing the three candidates to become a new federal district court judge for Eastern Washington, after the retirement of William Nielsen.

The constitution calls upon the Senate to "advice and consent" with the President in picking judges for their lifetime appointments. And our state has a long tradition of using bipartisan commissions to select judicial nominees to be sent on the President.

I was impressed by each of the nominees - their temperaments, their backgrounds and their ability to serve the people of Eastern Washington. I appreciate the work of the bipartisan commission, and once Sen. Cantwell has interviewed the candidates, I believe we will forward the names on the White House.

I also had the opportunity to join with local Spokane residents who understand the dangers of asbestos all too well. We met in front of the abandoned house of Ralph Busch and his wife Donna. After investing two years and tens of thousands of dollars into their new home, they were forced to abandon their dream home after learning it contained deadly Zonolite insulation. I also met with Mary Sather, a local resident who suffers from asbestosis and Dr. Alan Whitehouse who has treated hundreds of asbestos victims from Libby, Montana.

The most heartbreaking aspect of their stories is that their experiences were preventable. There are between 15 and 35 million homes, schools and businesses in America that still contain this hazardous substance, including many in Washington state. I am working in Congress to end this failure to protect public health from the dangers of asbestos by passing legislation.

I also toured the site of the Spokane Combined Readiness Center. This facility will provide training and coordination to help police, firefighters, emergency services personnel, and the National Guard prepare for and respond to a natural or man-made disaster.

I secured nearly \$9 million in federal funding for the Spokane Combined Readiness Center.

The September 11th attacks highlight the importance of first responders to our communities. This Center will be instrumental in helping Spokane coordinate its response to a range of threats and incidents. We must protect our communities by providing first responders the training and resources they need to carry out a dangerous and difficult job.

SPOKANE VISIT

On Tuesday, I spent the day in Spokane to meet with judicial candidates, to discuss the dangers of asbestos, and visit the site of the new Spokane emergency preparedness center with the Chiefs of the Spokane Police and Fire Departments and the head of the National Guard.

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